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THE RIGHT OF PEOPLES TO SELF-DETERMINATION AND ITS APPLICATION TO PEOPLES UNDER COLONIAL OR ALIEN DOMINATION OR FOREIGN OCCUPATION

**Written statement* submitted by North South XXI,
a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[22 December 2000]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, as received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

The right of the Guianese people to self-determination.

1. Clashes between French police and Guianese independence militants occurred in November 2000 at Cayenne, a French possession in America.

The Guianese resistance, completely ignored by the international media, has consistently opposed the second-class citizen status imposed on the indigenous population, for example in November 1996 and March 2000. Local assemblies themselves have demanded autonomous status; the French Government has responded with speeches (François Mitterrand, during the Presidential election campaign of 1981, acknowledged "the right of the French overseas departments and territories to self-determination", and President Chirac stated on 4 April 2000 that "if a particular overseas territory or department decides to separate from France following a vote, this would of course be possible without drama or difficulty").

2. A report issued by a French member of parliament (C. Taubira-Delannon) on 14 December 2000 highlights the economic and social crisis afflicting the Guianese population, and the serious damage that gold-mining is doing to the environment and public health. According to the parliamentary report submitted to the French Government, "if the environmental, health and social costs of gold production are taken into account it is questionable whether it creates any value-added".

Modern colonialism, whatever words are used to describe it, is just as detrimental to the colonized peoples as it was in the past. The Amerindians, the "Bushinengue" (who fled from Suriname), and the rural Creoles who live in the interior are the first to suffer from the tree-felling to permit access to gold workings and the discharge of mercury, cyanide and mud into rivers and streams. A number of Amerindian villages have been polluted by methyl mercury through the food chain. Population movements in formerly isolated areas mean that diseases such as malaria are now more prevalent. The World Health Organization (WHO) has consequently classed French Guiana as a high-risk zone. Unregulated gold production is also a source of corruption and large-scale trafficking.

3. Economic plundering which completely denies the Amerindians their right to development is resulting in massive violations of health and environmental rights.

It is the Guianese people who should decide their fate and benefit from the natural resources in their territory, in accordance with the fundamental principles of international law and the preamble to the French Constitution; such are the demands of the Komité Pou Nou Démaré la Guyan and the Union des Travailleurs guyanais.

4. The situation in French Guiana and the many violations of economic, social and some political rights, which have not brought about a genuine economic "take-off" after the long period of French colonization, necessitate a recognition of the Guianese people's right to self-determination. While waiting for this inevitable process to develop, a working group should be formed to examine the human rights situation in one of the world's few remaining colonies.